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"Congressman Boyd Supports the Farm Bill "

WASHINGTON, DC B Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed, with strong bi-partisan support, the conference report for H.R. 2646, the Farm Security Act and Rural Investment Act. Congressman Allen Boyd (D-North Florida) voted in support of this important bill that provides \$410 billion in mandatory spending over the next ten years for assistance to farmers, conservation programs, rural development and nutrition assistance.

The 1996 Freedom to Farm Act made sweeping changes to federal farm programs with the purpose of providing a more market-driven economy for agricultural producers. However, consistently low prices for agriculture products have resulted in annual payments to assist farmers that go far beyond funds provided under current law. There has been a general consensus among the agriculture community and Members of Congress that those early bailouts are attributable to the failure of the Freedom to Farm Act.

Therefore, the House voted to pass a new farm bill in October of last year, while the Senate passed it's version in February of this year. Conferees, selected members from the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, have negotiated over the past two months to resolve the differences between the House and Senate bills. Earlier this week, the conferees came to an agreement that produced the final version of the Farm Bill, which is what passed in the House today. This bill, or conference report, will now be sent to the Senate for passage, and then on to the President for his signature.

Overall, the new Farm Bill is designed to bring predictability back to the federal government's farm support programs while enlarging participation in soil and water conservation and providing nutritional assistance to needy families. Florida's farmers, as well as the entire North Florida community, will greatly benefit from the provisions in the Farm Bill.

Farmers that produce program crops, like cotton, will now have a safety net that was not provided in the 1996 Farm Bill. They include, decoupled as well as countercyclical payments which will help farmers with the ups and downs in the agriculture market. The agreement also revises the peanut program by eliminating the quota system to make it similar to that of other program crops, beginning in the 2002 crop year.

Florida agriculture will also benefit in various ways from this bill, such as: country of origin labeling; an increase to the Market Access Program which helps U.S. farmers sell their goods in overseas markets; establishment of a three and a half year National Dairy Program; and the bill reestablishment of the no-net-cost concept feature of the sugar program.

Additionally, the conference agreement reauthorized the food stamp program, and allows States to provide transitional benefits for five months to families leaving welfare for work. It also restores food stamp benefits to legal permanent residents who have lived in the country for five years, recently-arrived children, the disabled and refugees. The Farm Bill also authorizes \$200

million for the purchase of fruits and vegetables for government nutrition programs, \$50 million of which will be used in school breakfast and lunch programs.

The agreement raises conservation spending by nearly 80%, to \$17.1 billion. Specifically, this funding will be used to raise the enrollment ceiling for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to 39.2 million acres, increase funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and several additional conservation programs. Furthermore, it will provide over \$2 billion for two new programs, the Conservation Security Program and the Grasslands Reserve Program.

Finally, the Farm Bill provides \$1 billion in funding for rural development initiatives, such as: the Rural Development Backlog Program; value-added market development grants; and a program to provide broadband services to rural areas.

"Since the passage of the 1996 Farm Bill, Congress has been working to address the shortcomings of the farm programs it established," said Boyd. "I believe this is a good first step in formulating a National Farm Program for the 21st Century that will truly allow our American producers to remain competitive in the global market."